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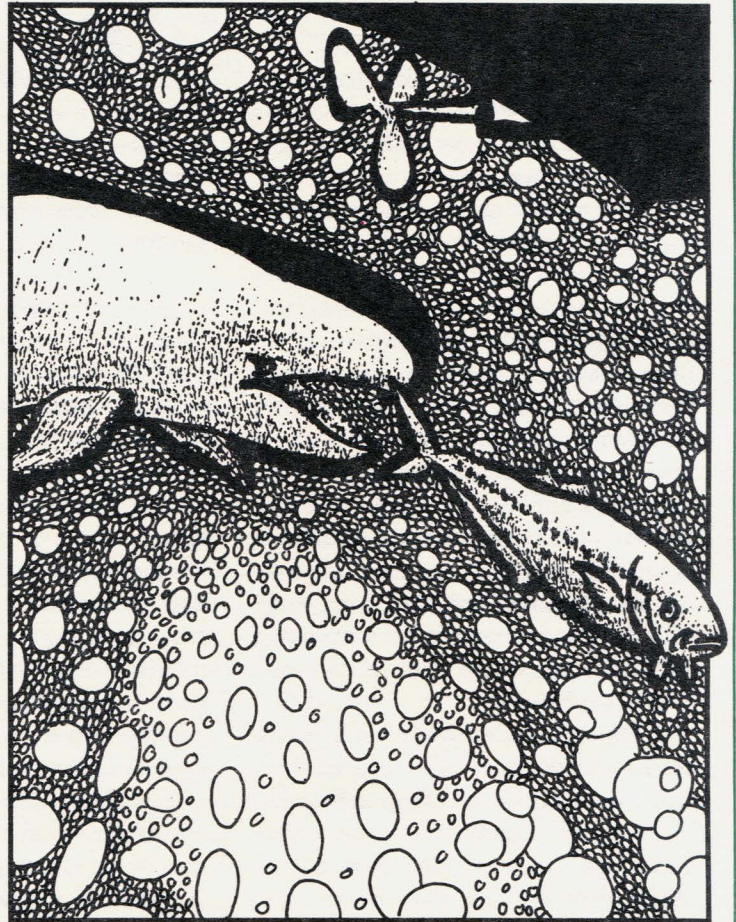
The Pseudorca Book of the Dead

Ocean meeting sky on a seamless horizon. Fluffy globular snowflakes strike the glassy surface of the water with a gentle "tss tss" shuffle repeated a million times until it fills the air like faraway radio static spreading a cold mantra over the face of the waters. It is just after noon on a February in the Sea of Japan. The snow stops falling just after sundown.

A pod of ten pseudorcas has been traveling for several hours without rest. One pseudorca suddenly echolocates a school of mackerel swimming twenty feet below. The pod stops, animals circle back and forth on the surface. The eldest female, matriarch of this dolphin pod, sounds her signature by forcing air through her pinched blowhole; the whistle informs her family that it's time to start the hunt. She whistles a second time. Three short bursts. The third procedure. Ten dolphins dive together, their jet black bodies sidling up against the mackerel school from ten different directions, churning the fish inward, slapping and waving flukes along the school's shimmering edge, corralling and massing the fish into a tight ball. Task accomplished, the elder emits a short whistle to direct her family to commence the second phase. Each dolphin begins to emit sharp bursts of clicks. The sound disorients the mackerel, effectively paralyzing the fish on the outer edge of the massed school.

Yet another whistle. While nine dolphins hold two thousand fish focused into a tight ball, the youngest member of the pod backtracks five yards and darts headlong into the pulsating mass. He closes his jaws around one tiger-striped fish, and then another, quickly swallowing them whole. The youngster returns to his position, permitting the next youngest to feed. This one zooms forward right into the dark heart of the school. She too eats her fill. The entire pod eats its fill within ten minutes.

The youngest pseudorca pushes to the surface to take a breath. The rest follow. "Pooh, pooh, pooh", muffled explosions punctuate the cold sky as three dolphins suck in the life-giving air. Then "pooh, pooh, pooh", three more dolphins blow twenty yards southward. And to the north, three more puffs of steam shoot straight up into the still air as three more backs roll across the surface in unison. Altogether, ten animals permutate their breathing cycle so that there are always three on the surface, seven down; Three up, seven down, never more, never less; dolphins



performing a rolling circular dance to an invisible drummer tapping out 3/10 time. They soon loll upon the surface of the sea to rest.

Several hours pass. They set off again in a rush southward, with nary a rest for half a day and a night. Finally growing hungry, they listen intently for some sound indicating human fishing activity. Approaching the *Shichiriga Sone* seamount located midway between Iki Island and Tsushima, they first hear the faraway rumble made by several hundred diesel engines. So many boats gathered together during a new moon indicates squid. The large snub-nosed dolphins change direction and swim to reach the source of the commotion forty miles away. They arrive on the fishing bank at three-thirty AM. It starts to snow lightly.

The pseudorcas entering the *Sone* are wary of boats but anxious to fill their bellies. Two years ago, the matriarch of this pod swam too close to a squid boat and was greeted with a sharp crack followed by the bleeding and pain of a gunshot wound, an injury that festered



for two months before healing. The incident taught her well to keep her pod beyond the spread of the arc lights. Now, approaching the first boat in their path, she dives accompanied by a male, her eldest son, to echolocate the squid hanging at regular intervals on the long line. Locating the first one, she zooms in to twist the mollusc off the lure so deftly that the fishermen on the boat never register her presence. The male does the same to the second line hanging starboard. Two more pseudorcas rush in to take their place. When each of the pseudorcas has eaten a squid apiece they move to the next boat. And then the next.

One pseudorca, a very large male approaching twenty feet in length, deftly unhooks two squid. He doesn't gulp them down, but instead carries them to the edge of the fishing bank to present the meal to a young female pushing a strange bundle in front of her. More than a week ago, she gave birth to a stillborn fetus. Yet even now, she is unwilling to relinquish the rotting lump of black flesh to the ocean. So she has tucked it under her pectoral fin or bounced it along with her snout across the last four hundred miles of open ocean. This behavior is recorded among certain dolphin species, but also documented among elephants.

The male's altruism is not a unique behavior for dolphins either. A mated male crow was documented bringing food to a handicapped but unmated female. The association lasted two breeding seasons, even though the male was simultaneously pressed to feed its mate's chicks as well.

The Dolphin Theodicy

A half hour before dawn. The sky starts to lighten. The squid begin to flee the water's surface, start their long descent down the steep slopes of the seamount. Longlines are reeled up for the last time. Fishermen on five boats out of the two hundred in the fleet curse to notice a few stray pieces of squid flesh caught on the snag lures. How many more were taken without a remnant left behind? It has to be the work of Oki Gondo Iruka, pseudorca.

Pseudorcas, sometimes called false-killer whales, are powerful, jet-black snub-

nosed dolphins attaining twenty feet in length. Except they are not *pseudo* or *false* anything, in fact they bear only a passing resemblance to the much heavier black and white orcas and look a bit like small sperm whales. Each adult pseudorca consumes about a hundred pounds of squid per day and, as might be expected, the species is exceedingly capable at catching as many squid and fish as they need. For this reason, snatching squid off a long line is difficult to explain as a matter of simple opportunism. Fishermen report that dolphins grab just a few squid from each long line when they could just as easily take them all. Sometimes, they prey on long lines while ignoring large schools of free-swimming squid who are half-dazed by the lights.

While fishermen the world over regard pseudorca pilchering as theft, behavioralists retort that it might just as easily be a sassy test of skill for this intelligent animal to steal the occasional bait without encountering the bite of the hook. Cetacean mythologists who rely on the pick of intuition and the shovel of conjecture to corroborate dolphin intelligence, recast pseudorca predation as a gesture of communication from a socially advanced being eager to make contact with human beings. The game is being played, not for food or *chutzpah*, but to tell the fishermen much the same thing Humphrey Bogart told his *gendarme* friend at the end of *Casablanca*: "Louie, this could be the start of a beautiful relationship."

Dexter Cate, in his seminal work to promote coexistence with cetaceans in Japan, asserted that the pseudorcas of the *Shichiriga Sone* were "humans of the sea" and environmental educators attempting to caution the fishermen against overfishing. Cate was an environmental tactician of the first order whose rhetoric was highminded although, sometimes, recklessly anthropomorphic. The certitude of his tone often made him seem a kind of cetacean high priest preaching a dolphin theodicy that reconciled every dolphin behavior as inherently good, no matter how detrimental it seemed to the fishermen hurt by it. Cate asserted that the dolphin slaughters at Iki Island followed a tragic pattern of destruction being played out at several places around around the

world. In Nova Scotia, Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound, and a hundred other formerly fecund waters around the world, it was human beings who overharvested the resource, not any natural predator. Yet as occurred in all those other fished-out places, imminent signs of a crash in stocks turned the Iki fishermen headstrong rather than frugal. Instead of instilling strict rules to conserve and replenish the stock, they underwent a futile period of fighting bitterly with other predatory species to control who caught the *last* of the fish.

In Nova Scotia, fishermen blamed the crash of the cod and haddock fisheries on harp seals, which led to a very expensive government-sponsored slaughter of seals, even after it was brought out that harp seals don't actually prey on those species. At Iki, a similar war was fought with pseudorcas and bottlenose dolphins.

The old female calls her family together with a distinct pulsed whistle notifying each animal that a large mackerel school is swimming southward off the bank. Time to gather together, to start thinking about moving south again. As she whistles, two adults are busy at play, nudging and poking each other, and then swimming just fast enough so that the other can soon catch up and repeat the nudge. Two others swim back and forth just below the surface engaged in one of a hundred acoustic games that so entertain their species, improvising whistles and rhythms back and forth in a process that, if a human did it, would be called a musical improvisation. Two other podmates are demonstrating a deep-diving breathing



cycle to two juveniles. Breathe in, breathe out, five times. Then down and down they all plunge together, following the edge of the *Sone* cliff, down beyond the light, until they finally enter the occluded realm where the fish possess huge eyes, ungainly teeth set in lantern-hinged jaws, and spots and dabs of neon lighting to attract whatever sparse prey may be available. Two more dolphins are sleeping in the manner so peculiar to their race. One half of the brain nods off while the other half remains alert, never relinquishing conscious control over the muscles that point them toward the precious store of oxygen above the surface of the sea. When one half of the brain is refreshed, the other half dozes off. The female with her fetus rests on the surface. It stops snowing.

As the family assembles, the female hears a new sound, the faraway pulse of many diesel engines throbbing their way towards the *Sone*. Is that what it is? She peers upward a moment to witness one of the world's wonders, the quicksilver sheen of the ocean surface undulating away in ever direction. At this moment, the kinetic surface looks particularly radiant, shimmering with color from a red sun suddenly breaking through a cloud on the horizon. The feeling is irresistible. Up she goes, pushing her body through the silvery shimmer and into the air, hangs a moment, then falls back heavy into the sea with a monumental splash. Then up again, this time spyhopping, pushing her body halfway out of the water to get a different perspective on the situation. She listens south, then north, east and finally west. But through the air, a fishing boat can be heard from a distance no greater than a mile. She hears nothing save the squawking of the opportunistic seagulls who follow the pod in anticipation of a wounded fish thrown up by a feeding frenzy. She allows her body to sink below the surface to hear the engines clearly.

Life meets no-life

For reasons beyond a logic human beings can fathom, the matriarch decides not leave the *Sone*, but to wait for the boats to arrive. The case can be made that she is simply unaware that the boats rumbling toward her pod are no longer a fishing



fleet, but an armada moving into battle formation. That interpretation must be balanced with the fact that roundups have occurred on the *Sone* every winter for the past ten years. In daylight, fishermen all along this coast shoot at dolphins. Or perhaps she regards the apparent danger as a source of more fun and games...an abstract challenge...a gamble? Perhaps, although the risk seems far more apparent than the frolic. The boats should arrive on the *Sone* in about twenty-five more minutes. The dolphins whistle the current state of affairs back and forth among themselves. And then, for reasons that may forever remain alien to the mind of a rational human being, they calmly return to the business of deep diving, teaching, singing their melodies, sleeping.

Two hours pass. Four hundred boats assemble into a vast horseshoe formation around the dolphins to start a coordinated sweep across the *Sone*. As the pod is encircled, the fishermen become angry. Who radioed back to the Island that there were hundreds of dolphins preying off the fishing boats. Only ten? Impossible!

On each boat, two men each grasp hold of a *Tsukimbo*, a section of galvanized pipe with a flare on one end. They lean over the gunwhale, hold the *tsukimbo* firmly against the outside hull of the boat so the bell is immersed a meter below the water's surface. Then the clanging starts; the excruciating white noise of ballpeen hammers striking eight hundred pipes. The sound slices through the *Sone* like a meat cleaver to neutralize the dolphin's supersensitive acoustic sensing organs.

In a sea with a visibility no greater

than fifteen feet, this sudden inability to hear anything whatsoever has the cumulative effect of rendering each animal a "blind" cripple. They can not echolocate, can no longer discern each other's signature whistles. For the first time in their lives they are on their own, disconnected from family, swimming in a hostile environment without the crucial bond of "podness" to guide the decision-making process.

The ten pseudorcas form a dense ball, writhing and rolling across each other's sinuous coal black bodies, touching, licking, tasting, whistling, gyrating their way to accord. It is this communal caress, and the taste of each other's skin that provides the barometer of each individual's current mood. The youngest animal starts to shiver to express the disorientation caused by the noise. Quickly now, one animal and then another and another pushes away from the circle. A strange calm settles over the pod. Dying is in the air, a risk and a ritual to play out along the tenuous borderline where life meets no-life.

Of all cetacean species, the pseudorca and its close cousin the pilot whale, are most often seen stranding. In the British Isles alone, eighteen mass strandings by pseudorcas have been recorded since 1913. In Fort Pierce Florida, 150 pseudorcas beached themselves in 1970. The record, (what a concept) occurred along the shores of the Mar del Plata, Argentina in 1946 when 835 shiny black, snub-nosed bodies pushed themselves high up on a beach during a declining tide. How do they actually die? The larger animals may expire from the weight of their own bodies pressing and eventually bursting internal organs. But most expire when all that black absorptive skin becomes exposed to the air and the sun, forcing the temperature of the body core to climb higher and higher like a car engine void of its cooling water envelope. The animals literally cook themselves from the inside out within a few hour's time.

Opinions run the gamut as to why such an intelligent creature sometimes seems so utterly determined to rush forward to their own death while safety seems so attainable. Biologists look for physiological causes and find them, asserting that many strandings are caused

by infestations of worms within the animal's middle ear, an ailment that precipitates a severe loss of balance. Because it is also posited that cetaceans may fear drowning above all else, an epidemic of worms causes the sick animal to seek out the only real alternative to drowning which is a beach. Pod bonds insist that the healthy follow the stranded ashore. Whether they are trying to save their comrades, or actually join them on the beach, is an idea that has long been debated and never answered. But most marine biologists roundly reject the latter interpretation. There is simply no evolutionary advantage to a healthy community of mammals dying in support of a single sick individual.

No matter how human beings choose to explain it, the pseudorca's predilection to mass stranding seems debonair in the face of the deep mystery we humans wedge between ourselves and our own impending mortality. What do the pseudorcas know about death that we do not? What have they seen that we can not? Dolphin mythologists declare that stranding is an act reserved for brains larger than our own. the rush to death is a ceremony, the outer manifestation of a wisdom beyond what the smaller human neocortex is able to grasp, or to bear.

Every stranding theory also has its detractors. For instance, worm infestations plague all cetacean species, while only a few related species of toothed whales strand in groups. All these are among the species whose pod-bonds are strongest. Then again, many other pod-bonding species rarely strand. Some behavioralists contend that pseudorcas are deep ocean creatures who become confused by inshore

landmarks like beaches and shoals. Animals touch bottom for the first time in their lives. The novel sensation of gravity exerting an influence upon all that fleshy mass causes a severe disorientation, analogous to the feelings described by astronauts floating in space for the first time. Because young and inexperienced animals are naturally the most curious, they tend to be the first to get themselves stuck on shore. They call for help. It summons mother to the rescue. Mother gets stuck. She calls father, who calls uncles, aunts, cousins, so on. If the tide happens to be in retreat, the pod eventually lies strung out like onyx beads upon the smooth neck of the beach.

If some strandings are a ceremony, the question still remains why any community of sentient individuals—whether man or beast—would choose suicide as a behavioral option. In fact that response displays an underlying cultural bias. The Aztecs and the ancient Egyptians had a far more sympathetic relation with death than modern Western culture. Traditional Inuit encouraged their elders, their own mothers and fathers, to walk off into the winter cold during food scarcities. Tibetan religious accession is founded so firmly in the circular logic of reincarnation, that after a priest dies, lamas wait a few years, and then conduct a formal search to locate the toddler incarnation of their departed master. Reincarnation also grants a familiar ease to the otherwise chilling "rush to death" touted by the Japanese Samurai code. Or perhaps Pliny the Elder explained strandings best, if not obliquely, in his description of the death ceremony of the inhabitants of a fictional country. He wrote that sorrow was unknown in *Hyperborea*.

The people chose the time of their death carefully, and then celebrated it by feasting and rejoicing. Soon thereafter, they put an end to their lives by plunging into the sea from atop the "leaping rock".

On the border of the *Shichiriga Sone*, this morning, ten pseudorcas have begun their long haul to land. They continually touch one another, torso sliding against torso, genitals, flukes, lips, gently scraping their saber teeth along the length of one another's body. The resultant parallel lines etched into their black skin vaguely resembles I Ching graffiti or, perhaps American Indians applying body paint before a ceremony. The pseudorcas travel before the boats as a unit, all ten animals surfacing to breathe in a single roll. Only the dead fetus seems the slightest bit out of synch, as if one of the members of the pod is kicking a soccer ball in front of her.

The human/dolphin procession slowly approaches the headland of Tatsunoshima Island. They pause a brief moment as they enter shallow water where the sound of the *tsukimbos* is greatly muffled. An instinctual hesitation is followed by a danger signal whistled between several animals. The water here tastes unhealthy; a strange pungent flavor; like the taste near fishing boats, but much more pervasive. Before them lies the entrance of a deep-cut bay with uptilted sides. They echolocate the bottom. The unfamiliar landscape of sand and rocks signifies something sublime if not forbidding; it is the closest to shore any of them have swum in their lifetime, and a new experience for pelagic creatures who have never witnessed edges to their ocean.

Inside the bay, the young pseudorca female suddenly leaves the group to push her decomposing fetus toward a nearby seaweed bed. She holds it under her pectoral fin, dives to the bottom, to wedge it under a crevice in fifteen feet of water. She resurfaces and swims to rejoin her pod. Only then does her family swim the final two hundred yards into the center of the bay. Here, they pause to peruse a galvanized hurricane fence that defines the border of the shallow inner cove of the bay. Staccato bursts of clicks strike the surface of the steel mesh. The resultant echo resonates the large bone of the pseudorca's lower jaw, stimulates nerve receptors and is





sent to the brain. In such a manner, the pseudorcas perceive an inflexible, opaque, mesh that rings back at them as if possessed of its own voice. Echolocation is to a toothed whale what vision is to a human: the primary source of perception. When clicks strike a fleshy object such as a fish, the sound penetrates directly into the animal. The resultant echo displays a three-dimensional image of fishy shape and density. An air bladder shows up differently than a kidney. Bones are opaque. As are hurricane fences.

Editor's Note: I spent two winters on Iki Island working alongside local fishermen to uncover some way, any way, to get them to stop slaughtering dolphins. These were goodnatured, practical men who were always polite to me despite our difference of opinion about cetaceans. Once I'd gotten a foot in the door, I became the only foreigner granted access to the killing cove at Tatsunoshima Bay. The violence I witnessed there has left an indelible stain on my soul.

The events described next are taken from notes of a heartbreaking roundup I watched while listening through an underwater hydrophone system. Tragically, I had no means to stop it. Any conjecture about observed dolphin behavior is entirely my own. This story is an excerpt from a book I'm writing which will be published next year by Henry Holt, entitled:

The Charged Border: Where Human Nature Meets Dolphins and Whales.

The Black Daisy

The pseudorcas pause a long moment to rub their bodies against the metal as if trying to determine an immediate sensual meaning from the galvanized fence. Then, one at a time, they swim through the ringing portal of the gate into the Killing Cove, swim until they hit the sandy bottom with each thrust of their flukes. When they are all inside the fence, they back up a few feet into slightly deeper water and turn to face one another; ten pseudorca bodies emanating from a common center like the petals of a jet-black daisy. The largest animal raises its head a bit to call once into the still air. In my own experience, it is exceedingly rare for a cetacean to vocalize in air, and the moan takes me by surprise. I have no microphone on board, but drop the hydrophone over the edge of the boat, don headphones, and turn on the cassette recorder. The call sounds vaguely like a piccolo sliding up an e-minor scale. The sound is picked up underwater by several animals who resonate the overtones and accentuate the tonic. I imagine the vibrations shimmering off their acoustically sensitive skin, resonating along the length of each animal's body out to the very tips of the flukes where it is retained a moment, and then rolls back toward their heads. Even as the harmony seems to focus the daisy into a living musical instrument, it also evinces the destiny of this pod. The sound brings tears to my eyes.

Sound possesses physical heft underwater, which causes me to wonder if the pulse might massage the tender skin of each animal. If so, then this call projecting from the center of the black daisy may help prepare the group mind for the task ahead. Massage relaxes the body, helps it respond better to a situation that causes physical stress. When muscles and internal organs relax, they better withstand the unfamiliar weight of gravity pressing against them. The large male ceases his call. The chorus stops answering him. The pseudorcas break from their circle and slip backwards

into deeper water. Their breathing seems to deepen. One at a time each animal surges forward until its momentum is finally inhibited by the impenetrable mass of the beach. Motionless now. Exhale once. Exhale a second time, and then again. Now inhale. The deed is done. The pod has stranded.

On the beach now, unfamiliar sensations vie for attention. The imponderable pull of gravity enacts its burden, jamming innards tightly against the spinal column. The skin, that exquisitely sensitive jet black silky skin, immediately starts to harden, shrink, and later, crack under the glare of the winter sun. Body heat cooks them from within.

The ten fishermen who stand along the shore holding spears and hooks in anticipation of a bloodletting, suddenly realize the pseudorcas have done the job for them. They've seen it before. While the bottlenose dolphins they catch always go into a frenzy, fighting for their lives, and ripping up nets, the pseudorcas simply strand. So even as the Iki fishermen are well prepared to enact a bloodletting, they seem to grasp the pseudorca stranding as an act worthy of their respect. It is a state of grace to be admired.

I am watching the pseudorcas' physical agony unfold from a moored rowboat on the opposite side of the killing cove. Gravity seems like the nails of this crucifixion. The sand is their cross. They heave their torsos upward for breath, occasionally lift their flukes as if testing a remembrance of locomotion, dropping them like an afterthought, with a splash and a resounding thud that echoes off the rock face that looms above the beach. I watch them struggle and start to weep openly, deeply discouraged over my observer's role, unable to change anything occurring on this beach. I feel shamed and defiled to realize these dolphin killers are just men like any other men. They display no innate evil. Just a few days earlier I had shared a drink with a few of them in a local bar. I laughed until my sides ached to hear one of them sing "ta a yero rib u un" (Tie a Yellow Ribbon) into the microphone of a Karaoke machine. That singer is now standing on the shore, leaning on his lance like an athlete preparing to heave the javelin. He strolls down the beach to stand

over the pseudorcas who likewise watch him in silence through their dark brown eyes. Of the men working the killing cove, I have noticed at least four of them make the same contemplative journey over the past ninety minutes.

A fishermen once described for me his first experience of a pseudorca stranding. His words carried the same sense of awe he might have used to describe a first visit to Mount Fuji. It was wondrous. But now, after ten years of watching pseudorca pods strand in much the same purposeful manner, he adds a different emotion to the mix. He feels a distinct discomfort standing beside an animal. He still feels mystified, but also troubled that there never seems to be a clear expression of the dolphin's agony. If not suffering, if not pain and pathos, then what is it that the pseudorcas are experiencing? Their dying seems so easy. They drift away like snow melting in a spring thaw.

It is this passivity that annoyed the storyteller most of all, a point driven home to me earlier today when I watched a fisherman kick a pseudorca whose only affront was forcing the man into eye contact. There is something deeply communal about that stare, as if the whale is asking: "won't you join me to find shelter from the storm?" A few fisherman stare back in curiosity. It unnerves them, this look of death staring them in the face without flinching. Most look away. Others only think of reaching for their spear, or at least a good boot, to rectify the situation. All who witness the look never forget it.

After ten years of trying to understand, the fishermen no longer know what it is they are witnessing, how to behave, or what vocabulary to use to discuss this troubling act among themselves. During the brief moment when eye contact is sealed, the pseudorcas demonstrate their awareness. In that revelation, even ordinary men must abruptly recognize themselves as murderers. One man confided to me that a pseudorca stranding can not possibly be a mindless act perpetrated by an animal bound by instinct. It is conscious, willed, a cetacean ceremony that invites death into their oceanic heart, an act akin to a fisherman praying to his Shinto gods to insure the safety of the fleet.

A minute passes. The man leaning on his spear sighs, finds a flat stone, throws it in the water, lights up a cigarette, turns to stare at his friends and neighbors, men just like himself, who would be just as willing to enact a carnage, if events warranted it. Finally, pilgrimage complete, he nods once at the pseudorcas lying before him, then turns around to casually walk back down the beach to join his fellows.

Too quickly, just two hours after having come ashore, the two juvenile pseudorcas turn on their sides, mouths agape, eyes glazed over, rocking back and forth in the gentle lap of the waves. Dead. I briefly chant to myself:

The earth, the water, the fire, the air
Return, return, return, return...

How did they ever manage to die so quickly? Did their livers explode from the sheer weight of their own body? Or is it something else. I learned long ago that cetaceans possess voluntary control over their own breathing. In fact, this respiratory trait inspires as much conjecture by dolphin mythologists as the large brain, the altruistic behavior, the echolocation. Some speculate that dolphin breathing must be a form of Yoga, a be-here-now meditation that leads to supernatural control over physiological function. The ultimate implication is that when a dolphin inhales to hold its breath, it can will itself not to exhale, and therefore die as it wishes. No need to shove a gun barrel in your mouth or jump off the Golden Gate bridge. Just stop breathing.

Lying on either side of the carcasses, older podmates choose to hold steady in the conscious meltdown. I have been told that most of the stranded animals take about twenty-four hours to expire. The fishermen can tell when the end is near. The skin cracks. Muscles start to spasm. Breathing becomes short. Quickly now, they relax into a vortex too powerful to resist. Slowly, ever so slowly they leave their bodies. Do they also perceive the long-illuminated tunnel described by human refugees of the near-death experience? Do other long-departed pseudorcas swim about them in greeting? Do they pause a moment to echolocate on their own body

lying there on the pure white sand.

The body spasms one last time. White light. Delight. It is in such a manner, that I imagine the pseudorcas drifting off the sands of Tatsunoshima. Gone. God Bless.



Least Loved Beasts

edited by Terril Shorb and
Yvette Schnoeker-Shorb
Native West press, 1997

No bunnies, dolphins, dogs, robins or horses in this book, which celebrates varmints, bugs, creepy-crawlies, and all the non-celebrity species that deserve our respect and attention. Jim Nollman's piece entitled *The Lesson* from the 1996 summer Interspecies Newsletter, about a caterpillar attacked by ants is one of the few essays in this anthology of mostly poetry.

...Because they are ordinary
Because they are everywhere
Because they have to scabble each day for food
Because they are not flashy
Because they are intent on their business
because they are adapted to their lives.
—Why I watch sparrows, Greg Kosmicki

I've seen you sunning your eggsac
a diamond studded pillow
turning it on warm sand
dreaming of your brood
wondering when they'll get on your back
but you give it hollow abandon
at a predator's approach.

Burrowing Wolf Spider, Matt Welter

...Before there there was John Lilly and Koko the gorilla and double blind experiments and workshops on how to swim with dolphins, there was Aesop, Raven, and Coyote. What was primarily communicated between species was a matter of myth, metaphor, parable, drama. Before there was Martin Luther, Jesus, or Moses, it was the job of our spiritual leaders to sweat over the proper interpretation of the great issues of living, loving and dying as acted out by creatures like ants and caterpillars.

IC News

As the last issue of this newsletter reported, IC is expanding its focus, actively seeking projects that bring artists together with animals and natural places. Our interests are primarily strategic and non-combative. In keeping with this intent, IC has recently begun to promote two projects that meet these criteria. We will continue to update these projects and others in upcoming newsletters.

The Zero Circles

The Sierra Club's year 2000 zero-cut solution mandates the end of logging in our National Forests which, at the present time, provide 12% of the nation's timber supply. As a nationally known artist working on issues that meld environment with spirituality, Daniel Daniel proposes promoting this solution by constructing fifty circles (zeros) out of various found materials at fifty sites within the national forest system.

The circle may be humanity's most ancient icon of wholeness and healing, a symbol that includes the megalithic stone circles of ancient Britain, as well as the medicine wheels of Native America. The media impact of the zero circle's project could be immensely significant, perhaps equal to hundreds or even thousands of protestors assembled to promote much the same thing. One difference is that, in Daniel's proposal, the Forest Service itself is not an antagonist but an ally.

Each circle would be made differently, from kids holding hands in a clearcut, to flower petals in an ancient grove. Some will be enormous, and will need to be photographed from the air. Slide presentations and interviews would be given in each region.

Renaming the Map

The Pacific Northwest region, where IC resides, includes Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia. It was originally known as the Salish Sea, home of the Salish first peoples. Shann Weston, a new IC board

member has now proposed to construct a new map of this sea, showing the area from Olympia on the south to Campbell River on the North, and containing all original, native place names.

The significance is subtle but critical. Many of these names identify old animal trails, migrations, the places healers went to gather potent herbs like oregon grape or usnea, the places children avoided because predators resided there. They included names like "where the grizzly lives", "where the coho salmon gather", which attain special significance because the grizzly is now extinct in the region and the coho gravely endangered.

Compiling the map will demand much detailed research in ethnobotany, ecology, history, as well as consultation with native elders up and down the coast. The final product will be both beautiful and profound, a map of a golden lost age as well as of a hopeful future, where species movements, geology, and plant habitats take precedence over British aristocrats and explorers.

Program Funding

IC memberships support the office and this newsletter. They are at an all time high. Thank you members!

Unfortunately, for the first time in IC's twenty year history, our project and consulting fund (supported by 4-figure grants) is empty. When we can't pay expenses, projects can't happen and people don't get paid for work done. The most immediate result is that our third year of sponsoring musical work with humpback whales in Alaska has been canceled. Other work is on hold.

Fortunately, we have compassionate allies who are helping us fix the situation. Many thanks go especially to Virginia Coyle of Rock River, who has helped IC write a new business prospectus. She continues to guide us in planning a fundraising campaign for the fall.

We seek longterm supporters, either foundations or patrons. If any readers of this newsletter can help us emerge from this uncomfortable position, either through a direct grant or by networking potential donors, there is no better time

than right now. We will gladly send a business prospectus to anyone who asks for it. Fax us at 360.378.4020. Or send email to beluga@rockisland.com

And Finally...

The old rote view of animals is sometimes the only thing that keeps us from relating gently (and expeditiously) with other species. When we do relate to them directly, it's difficult not to attribute reason to their actions. Below is a story composed from different newspaper accounts of a sea lion encounter and rescue at sea, sent to IC by member Myfanwy Plank.

Off the Point Reyes Headland in northern California, a woman with a muscular disability, named Reggie Greywolf capsized her kayak in rough water. With the help of another kayaker she managed to come ashore on a small rocky islet sticking above the waves. The other kayaker then paddled off to find help. Greywolf was dazed but noticed a female sea lion staring at her while hovering over a dead pup that, apparently, had been attacked by sharks. Greywolf dragged herself into a tiny cave and curled up in a fetal position. The sea lion posted itself directly in front of the cave, and snarled in protection as several other sea lions attempted to get at the ailing woman. The other animals retreated. Then the sea lion lay right beside the woman. "She was my protector, she was," commented Greywolf. Eventually, a helicopter arrived. The sea lion snarled as it hovered directly overhead. But the snarling subsided when two paramedics landed on the shore and the helicopter flew away momentarily. Under the watchful eyes of the sea lion, the paramedics checked Greywolf's vital signs, and soon shuttled her to safety.

The paramedics reported a very different perception of the sea lion. "She was aggressive...watching the victim. I don't know if she was preparing for an attack or what." When they landed on the islet, the sea lion let them pass, and so the rescue occurred. When asked about this contrary account, Greywolf's guileless comment was "I won't belittle the sheriff. Everyone was so wonderful."